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ABSTRACT

An international studies major for undergraduate students at the State University of New York College at Cortland is described. The major is designed to provide students with knowledge and skills that enable them to understand and help change a world that is interdependent, and determined by long-range forces. It is hoped that the international studies program will prepare students to think critically, to work in a wide range of fields, and provide a sound foundation for pursuing work in graduate and professional programs with an international emphasis. Many of the students who are involved in the program are advanced students of foreign languages. The interdisciplinary nature of the international studies curriculum is discussed both in terms of the philosophical foundation the program and the specific requirements made of students. (DB)

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INTERNATIONAL STUDIES AT THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK COLLEGE AT CORTLAND

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International Studies at The State University of New York
College at Cortland

For many years, SUNY Cortland maintained a strong commitment to international education. The College required, for example, that all students earning the bachelor of arts degree take thirteen hours of a foreign language, or demonstrate equivalent proficiency; maintained the largest study abroad program of any of the units in the SUNY system; included required course work in "Contrasting Cultures" as part of its General Education program; and sought to foster international education in a variety of ways inside and outside the classroom. Over the years, the College had developed a critical mass of faculty with teaching and research interests in foreign nations and cultures. Still, it was felt that more focused attention should be given to international studies and opportunities should be provided for students wishing to concentrate in this area, as indeed many did. With this in mind, the College developed and is now implementing the International Studies major. This new program treats international studies as a distinct discipline, despite its inter- and multi-disciplinary nature. With this new major, we hope to provide students with a body of knowledge, a perspective, and a set of skills that will enable them to understand and help change a world which is internationally organized, and determined by long-range historical forces with multiple dimensions.

With the International Studies major, we believe we can teach students to think critically and in an informed manner about the most important issues of the modern world. We have designed the program as a

liberal arts major for the student seeking a challenging liberal education. We believe it will meet the needs of the student wishing to pursue an internationally oriented career in business, government, education, or with voluntary agencies. It will also appeal to the student who is particularly sensitive to the role of "world citizen." Overall, then, it provides students with a solid, meaningful, and enriching undergraduate education appropriate to a wide variety of future career and life interests. With these broad purposes in mind, this major has the modern international system rather than any single society as its object of study.

The goals of the major are twofold. First, it aims to provide students with a broad overall knowledge of the long range historical development of the international system, the multi-faceted nature of this system, and the intricate set of dependencies and interdependencies that are characteristic of this system. Second, it aims to provide students with the opportunity to study the system in depth from one particular disciplinary perspective, or by focusing on one particular region. Students who want to concentrate on a discipline can choose between political science, history, economics, or anthropology. Those choosing a regional concentration can study Asia and the Pacific Basin, Africa, Western Europe, or Latin America (See Figure 1).

The program has three major objectives. First, it seeks to provide a single framework, a single program title, and a single administrative unit--the International Studies Center--within which to define the variety of international curricular offerings and scholarly activities on the Cortland campus. The program's second objective is to create a benchmark undergraduate curriculum in international studies with its focus on the systemic interactions of the First and Third World, Northern and Southern hemispheres, and on the variety of problems and circumstances that beset

the system. Finally, we aim to bring the expertise of multiple disciplines to bear upon the complex problems of international development.

With an eye to students, the program has been designed to meet their needs now and, more particularly, in the future in several ways. It will prepare them to think critically and in an informed manner about the world in which they live and to make constructive contributions to improving the human condition; it will prepare students to work in voluntary, educational, human service, government, and business organizations involved in international affairs; and finally, it will provide students with a sound undergraduate foundation enabling them to successfully pursue more advanced educational work in graduate and professional programs with an international emphasis.

A high percentage of the students who have signed on for the new major are already advanced students of a foreign language. Many want double majors, in the language and in International Studies. The program seems to attract students who are interested in continuing with their study of the foreign language, but who are not particularly interested in literature. Colleagues who are involved in teaching the International Studies core courses report that contact with these advanced foreign language students seems to be an added incentive for other students to study a foreign language. Students with advanced foreign language skills seem to be the "best and the brightest," generally displaying more self-confidence and intellectual curiosity than our average student at Cortland. The non-language faculty has been pleasantly surprised, to say the least, by the presence of students who have impressive language skills, often in more than one foreign language, and who have a real love for learning languages. The program has, if one can put it this way, brought language education out

of the academic ghetto. It has also increased markedly the academic and intellectual interchange between language faculty and other faculty.

With an eye to the subject matter, the International Studies Program is an interdisciplinary one that draws for its course offerings and its faculty from existing departments, programs, and majors. Within the constraints of drawing on several departments, the program rests upon a set of intellectual and theoretical assumptions. The first of these is that the program should have a thematic coherence. In a determined and self-conscious manner, the program is not simply a mosaic of courses--it is not primarily a linking together of existing course offerings. We hope to achieve a disciplinary unity through the major so that portions of the major relate to and build upon one another. One of our biggest problems is achieving this. We are attempting to reach this goal of coherence through a variety of faculty development efforts. These include a regular International Studies Faculty Seminar, a Global Studies Work-Group (supported by United States Department of Education Title VI funds), proposed all-campus lecture/workshop series (e.g., Women and Development), and lectures and seminars on the campus. The effort here is to produce a coherence among a faculty that is distributed across a wide range of departments in the social sciences and humanities. In our faculty seminar, for example, we present the results of our research to each other and follow the presentation with a multidisciplinary discussion of its contents. The Global Studies Work Group has met to view systematically films used in our classes, to critique them from the multiple perspectives of our colleagues' different disciplines, and to work on curriculum development.

Our second assumption is a definition of the international system in terms of the interdependence of the nations and societies that make it up and a belief that the system is best understood through study of the relationships and dependencies within the system; in short, we view the world system as a system.

We believe that the international system has developed historically and must be understood as a historically conditioned and dynamically developing system. The connections that exist--political, economic, cultural, ecological, technological, demographic--do not exist simply in the present: they have developed from a concrete past.

Our forth assumption, therefore, is that questions of development and underdevelopment in historical perspective constitute central subjects of study. One interesting contradiction (and challenge for us) in the program at present is that although more professors who are involved in teaching the core course want the major to emphasize the Third World, there are many more classes at the college about European institutions and traditions. In addition, of the eight countries in which our students may study through our programs, only two, China and Mexico, are not in Europe.

We assume that the current "problems" and "circumstances" of the international system--whether hunger, poverty, debt, population, energy, industrialization, religious upheaval, or the arms race--constitute appropriate subjects for disciplined study.

We believe that undergraduate students should be exposed to important theoretical perspectives in the course of their study.

We are convinced that international studies should not be confined to the social and behavioral sciences; thus, course offerings in the arts (art, literature) are included in the program and the International Studies

Committee, which is charged with development of the curriculum, is currently exploring ways of expanding the program into professional areas such as elementary and secondary education, health education, etc. One indication of the need for such expansion is the inclusion of "global studies" in the latest New York State Regents' Syllabus for ninth and tenth grades.

We agree that a very rigorous set of language requirements must be an integral part of the major.

Specifically, the International Studies major requirements consist of the following (See Figure 1):

1) A year-long introductory core course (initially team-taught by five faculty members) designed to introduce a set of common thematic emphases.

2) Two cross-disciplinary courses (e.g., World Culture, Economic Anthropology, Politics of the Third World) to be chosen by the student.

3) A twenty-one credit hour concentration component: the student will choose between a disciplinary or an area studies concentration.

4) On top of the college's two-year language requirement, an additional two years of language study that can be filled through several options: students can begin study of a second foreign language, they can study abroad, or they can do advanced study in their first foreign language.

5) A final "capping" senior seminar which will bring students who have specialized in a discipline or an area back together to focus their shared expertise on a selected problem or aspect of the modern international system.

In conclusion, the new International Studies major is a pivotal step in meeting the challenge of international undergraduate education. It

represents not a "new initiative" but a final crystallization of important trends at the State University of New York College at Cortland.

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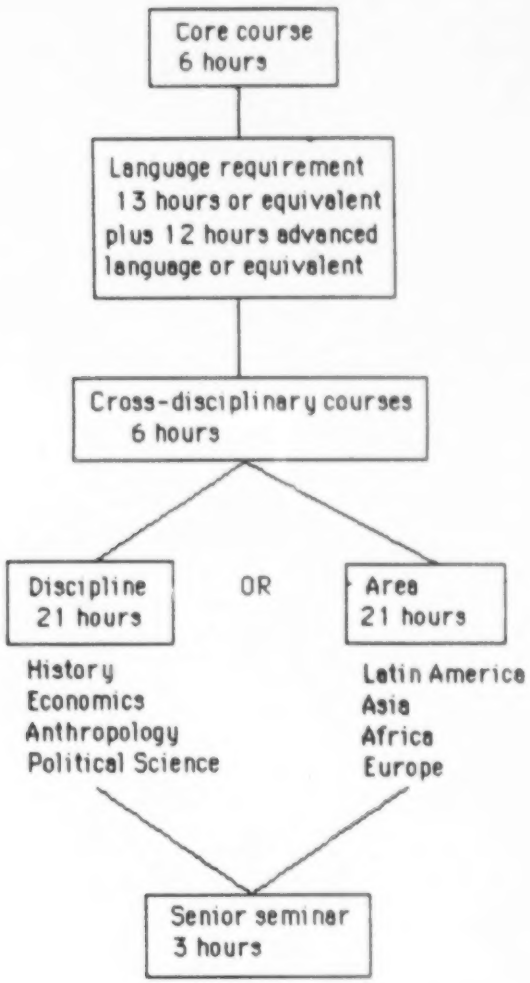
Fig. 1



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